

Archaeological Investigation at Konjuh, Republic of Macedonia, in 2000

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The project entitled "Archaeological Investigation at Konjuh," a joint project of Gettysburg College in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, and the Museum of Macedonia in Skopje, Republic of Macedonia, carried out excavation and survey at and around the site of Golemo Gradište, village of Konjuh, administrative district of Kratovo, Republic of Macedonia, from 26 June until 21 July 2000. This was the first season of a five-year project. Funding was provided for the 2000 season by a Research and Professional Development Grant from Gettysburg College, by a Project Grant from Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, D.C., and by the Museum of Macedonia.

This report presents not only the results of our first season of excavation but also an introduction to the ancient urban site of Golemo Gradište at Konjuh including a brief discussion of its features. Although known in local archaeological literature, the site has been visited by few archaeologists even from the Republic of Macedonia and is almost unknown outside the

borders of the former Yugoslavia. Only one monument from Konjuh, the unique Rotunda church, has found its way into handbooks on Byzantine architecture.

LOCATION OF THE SITE

Golemo Gradište is located 41 km east of Skopje. It lies ca. 6 km south of the Kumanovo-Kriva Palanka highway, on the Kriva River,¹ in a mining region. The Roman road from Skupi (Skopje) to Serdika (Sofia) ran several kilometers to the north of the city, which stood on a secondary east-west road leading to Kratovo.² The ancient name of the site is not known; one proposed identification is Tranupara.³ In the late antique or early Byzantine period, the city was probably located in the province of Dardania, whose capital lay at Skupi, although our knowledge of the exact boundaries of late Roman provinces is so uncertain that it might equally well have been included within the neighboring province of Dacia Mediterranea.

¹ The modern village of Konjuh is located ca. 2 km south of Golemo Gradište.

² B. Georgievski, "Rimskite patišta vo Kumanovskiot region," *Macedoniae Acta Archaeologica* 10 (1985–86) [1989]: 153–59. According to Georgievski, this secondary road diverged from the main one at the village of Klevčovce and ran southeast, passing fortresses near the villages of Dovezence, Konjuh, Šopsko Rudare, and Filipovci on the way to Kratovo. The same author suggests that a local road connecting the major east-west route with an eastern branch of the Naissus (Niš) to Thessalonike highway may also have passed by Konjuh. To what extent these proposed routes should be connected with the rock-cut road in the ravine east of Golemo Gradište or with the bridge over the Kriva River reported by S. Radojčić (as in note 5 below) remains unclear.

³ V. Lilčić, "Razmisľuvanja okolu ubikacijata na Tranupara," *Kulturno nasledstvo* 17/18 (1990–91) [1994]: 33–47.

Dr. Dragi Mitrevski, director of the Museum of Macedonia, and Dr. Carolyn S. Snively, associate professor of classics at Gettysburg College, served as the codirectors of the project. Other members of the staff were: Danče Golubovska, archaeologist-conservator, Republic Institute for the Protection of the Monuments of Culture (hereafter Protection Institute), Skopje; Dr. Virginia Anderson-Stojanović, archaeologist and ceramics analyst, professor of classics and fine arts, Wilson College, Chambersburg, Pa.; Biljana Pačkova-Kufojanakis, architect, Skopje; Miroslav Dimovski, photographer, Museum of Macedonia, Skopje.

In addition to the members of the staff and the funding agencies, we also wish to thank Dragiša Zdravkovski, deputy director of the Museum of Macedonia, for his help and kindness, and Jovan Kondijanov and Mitko Prendžov, director and associate director of the Protection Institute, for the excavation permit and other assistance.

HISTORY OF THE INVESTIGATION

The site at Konjuh first entered the professional literature in the 1940s with the publication of fragmentary inscriptions from the area.⁴ Svetozar Radojčić visited Konjuh in 1938; in 1952 he published a survey of the site and a detailed study of the very unusual church, the Rotunda, which had been excavated by local villagers in 1919.⁵ In the early 1970s Ivan Mikulčić surveyed the site and described a number of its archaeological features,⁶ as did Viktor Lilčić two decades later.⁷ Borka Dragojević-Josifovska collected the inscriptions from the vicinity and published them together in 1982.⁸

In 1988 Živojin Vinčić of the Protection Institute directed a project focused on the eventual conservation of the Rotunda.⁹ The construction of the Skopje-Sofia railroad line led to emergency salvage excavations in 1995 directed by Milan Ivanovski of the Protection Institute; in the cemetery area of K'šla, across the river from Golemo Gradište, a number of prehistoric and early Roman burials were discovered as well as a small early Byzantine church associated with a large vaulted tomb.¹⁰

In June 1998 a Macedonian-American project, directed by Kiril Trajkovski of the Museum of Macedonia and Carolyn S. Snively of Gettysburg College, surveyed the site and its immediate environs. Their objectives were to find, identify, and describe the features of the site visible on the surface and to record them on a topographical plan; to examine the Rotunda for

answers to specific architectural and liturgical questions; and to collect and analyze ceramic material from surface survey and test trenches in order to understand the diachronic occupation of the site and its commercial and cultural connections. The results of that pilot project have been incorporated into this report.

DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE

The hill known as Golemo Gradište¹¹ rises nearly 100 m above the Kriva River to a height of 440 meters above sea level (Figs. 1, 2). It served as the acropolis and the middle section of a fortified ancient city divided into three parts. This steep hill, nearly 500 m in length east-west, is one of a series of cliffs along the south bank of the Kriva River. In contrast to the generally steep and craggy terrain of the acropolis, the eastern end of the hill consists of a narrow plateau that slopes gently down from north to south and west to east. Beyond the eroded remains of rock-cut rooms visible along the northern side of the plateau, the bedrock drops to a steep, narrow terrace. The terrain then falls precipitously to the northern part of the city beside the Kriva River.

This second, northern part of the site consists of a gentle slope running from the foot of the acropolis north to the river. The line of the fortification surrounding this section of the city may be traced, and the fabric of the wall is visible in places, resting on a bedrock foundation beside the river (Fig. 3). The location of a north gate and the probable locations of an east and possibly a west gate can also be seen. Within this fortified area, the outlines of several large buildings are visible.¹² When Radojčić visited the site, he saw near the foot of the acropolis the walls of a large early Byzantine basilica,¹³ which

⁴ N. Vulić, "Antički spomenici naše zemlje," *Spomenik* 98 (1941–48): 96–97, nos. 211–13.

⁵ S. Radojčić, "Crkva u Konjuhu," *ZRVI* 1 (1952): 148–67.

⁶ I. Mikulčić, "Antički gradovi kod Drenova i Konjuha u Makedoniji," *Arheološki pregled* 15 (1973): 179–82; idem, "Über die Grösse der spätantiken Städte in Makedonien," *Živa antika* 24 (1974): 207–8; idem, "Dva bezimeni docnoantički grada vo Istočna Makedonija," *Zbornik na Arheološki Muzej Skopje* 6/7 (1975): 115–21; idem, *Srednovekovni gradovi i tvrđine vo Makedonija* (Skopje, 1996), 223–26; idem, *Antički gradovi vo Makedonija* (Skopje, 1999), 320–22, 358–61.

⁷ Lilčić, "Razmisluvanja," 36–37.

⁸ B. Dragojević-Josifovska, *Inscriptions de la Mésie Supérieure VI. Scupi et la région de Kumanovo* (Belgrade, 1982), 177–80.

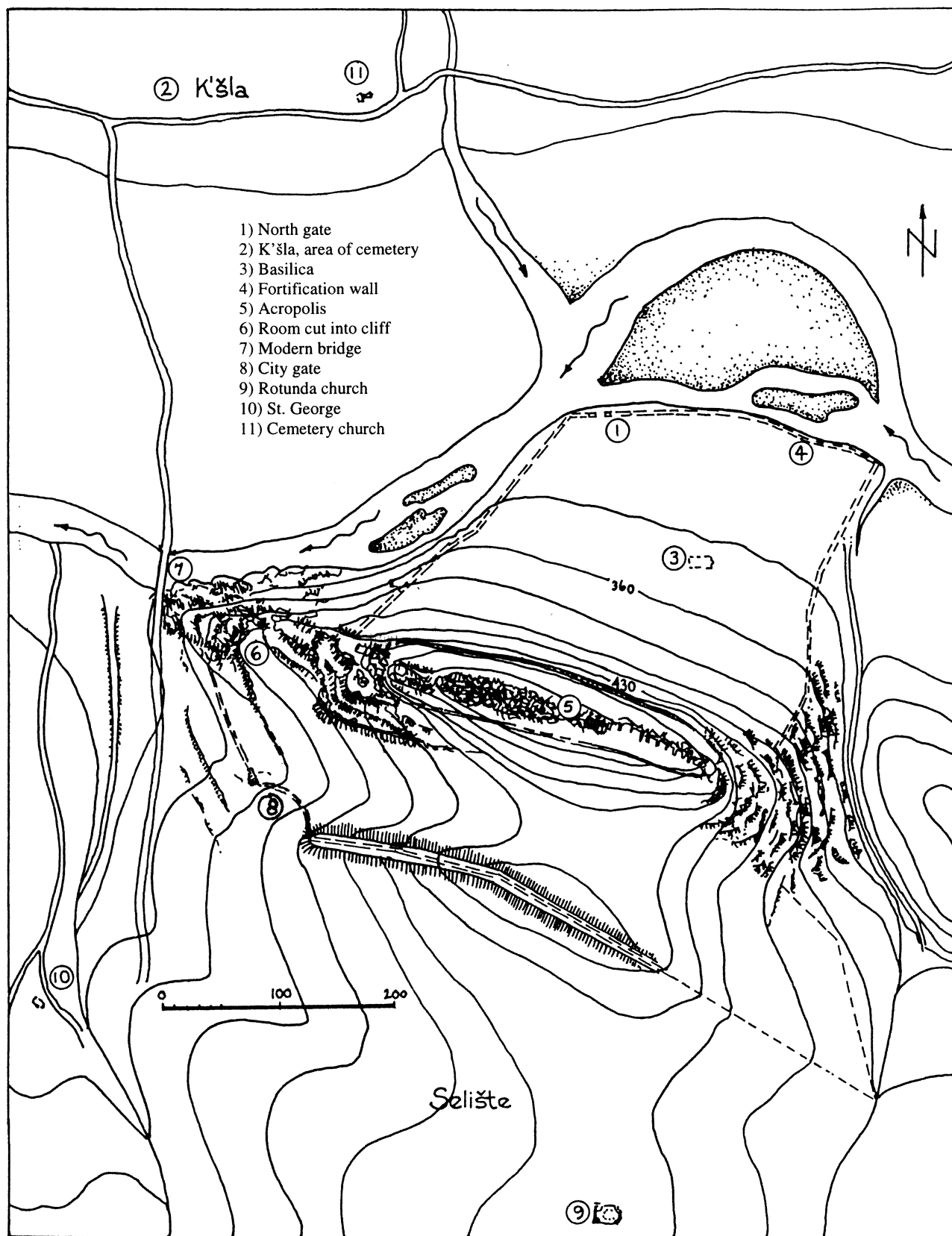
⁹ See the report by Ž. Vinčić et al., "Elaborat za konzervacija i prezentacija na Rotondata vo seloto Konjuh, 1988," in the archives of the Protection Institute.

¹⁰ See the brief note about the burials by M. Ivanovski, "K'šla," in *Arheološka karta*, vol. 2 (Skopje, 1996), 185. The church has not yet been published.

¹¹ In a strict topographical sense, Golemo Gradište refers to the hill, i.e., the large hill as opposed to Malo Gradište, the smaller hill or long ridge to its south. The term *gradište*, however, means a town site. Golemo Gradište is used here to refer to both the large hill and the site generally.

¹² A heavy covering of grass and bushes prevented the collection of pottery from this part of the site in 1998, so that the date of occupation—except for the 5th- or 6th-century basilica—remains uncertain. In June 2001, however, we examined material from a hole illegally excavated in this part of the site; although the pottery included a number of identifiably "Roman" sherds, the two levels of occupation dated to the 3rd–4th and 5th–6th centuries respectively.

¹³ Radojčić, "Crkva," 149.



1 Plan of Golemo Gradište (plan: G. C. McArdle, after I. Mikulčić, M. Milojević, and the National Survey Institute)



2 Golemo Gradište, acropolis, from the northwest



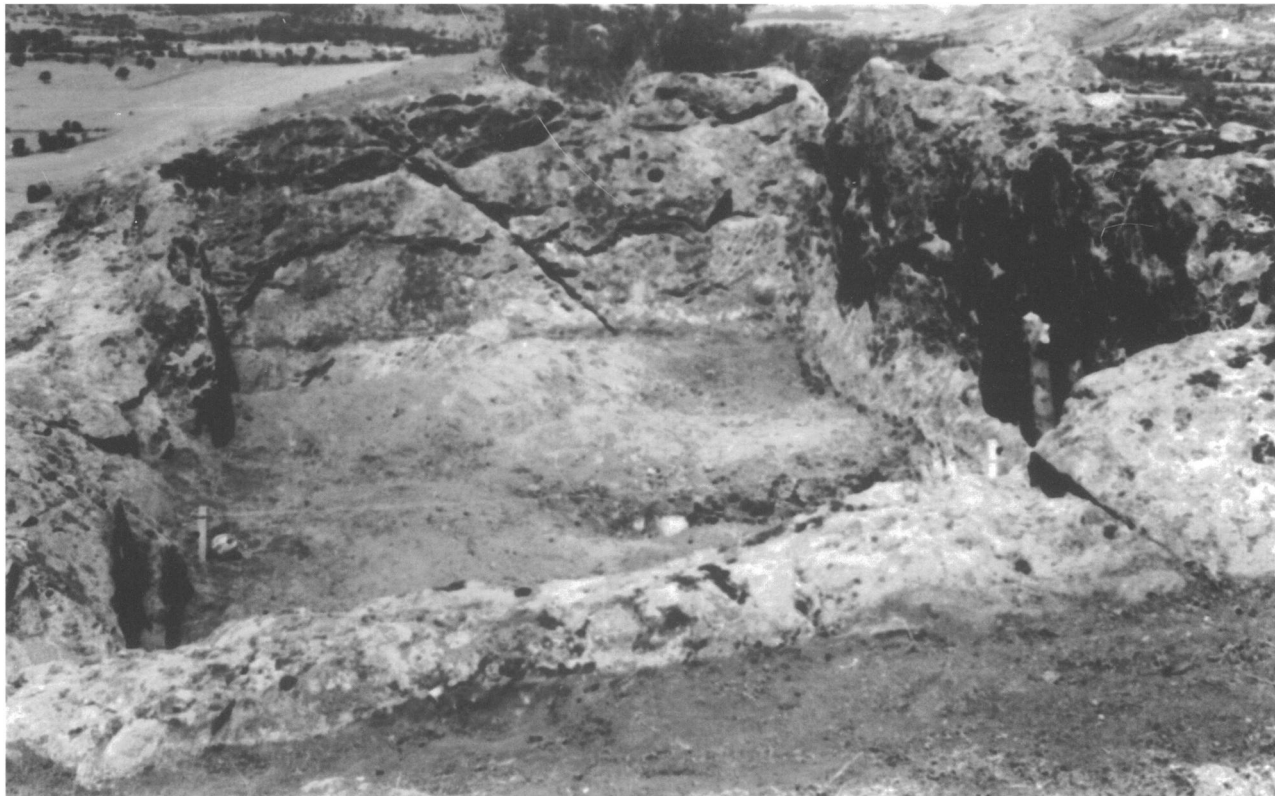
3 City wall foundation, north side along the Kriva River, from the northeast. The city wall is visible in places both above and behind the foundation.



4 Room in center of the acropolis, from the east. Note the placement of niches and a window so as to resemble a face.



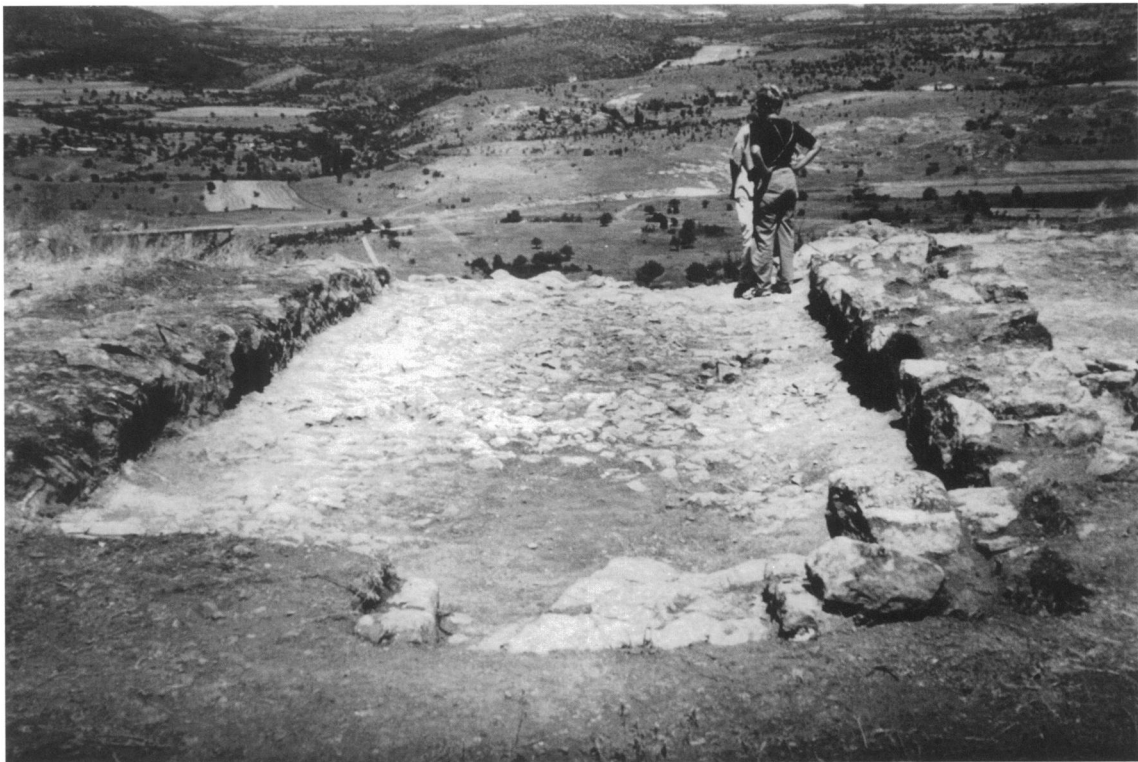
5 Entrance to rock-cut room in western part of acropolis, from the east



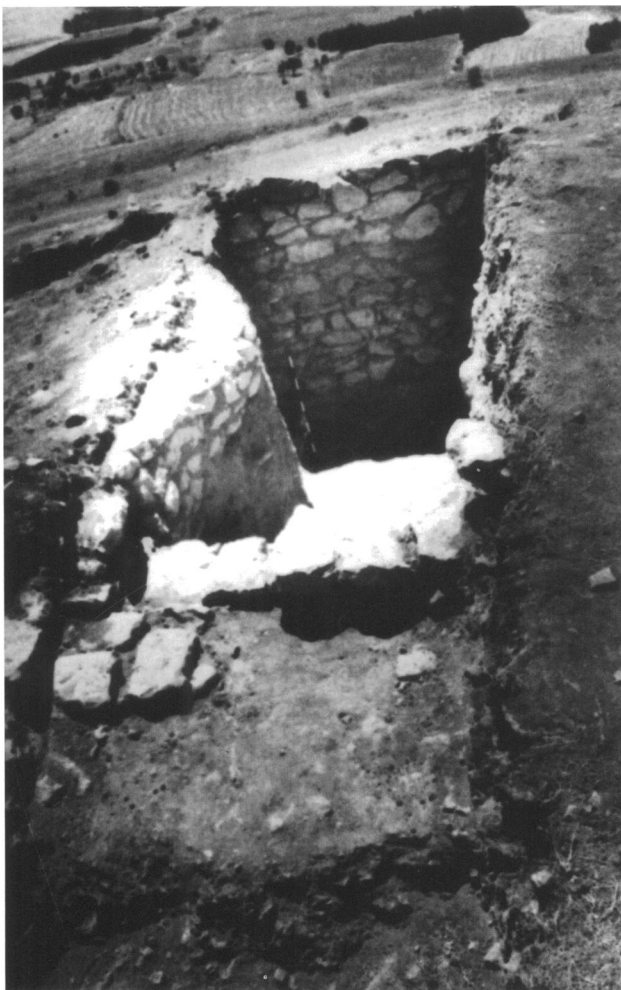
6 Cistern, Sector 1, acropolis, from the east, during 2000 excavation



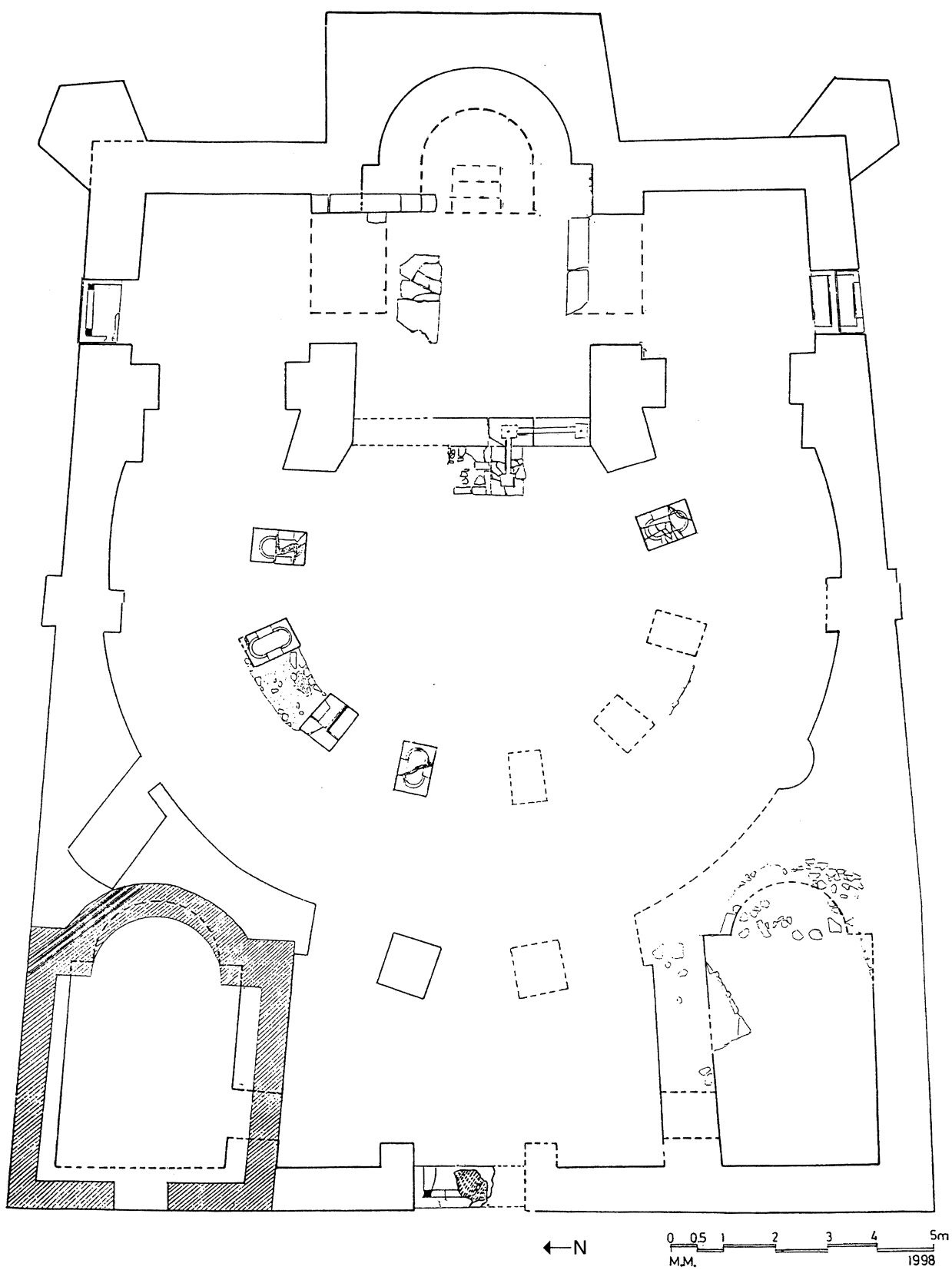
7 Eastern plateau, acropolis, from the west, before 2000 excavation



8 Western room, Sector 1a, acropolis, from the south



9 Sector 1b, Trench 3a, acropolis, from the north. Note the test trench dug (foreground) through the floor north of Wall 1 (center) and nearby steps (left). Wall 2 appears as a rounded feature (left middle ground); the fortification wall marks the trench's south end.



10 Plan of rotunda (plan: M. Milojević)



11 North half of rotunda, from the southeast, 1988. Note apse (lower right), large northern pier (center), and modern chapel (upper left).



12 The newly cleaned St. George, from the northeast, 2000



13 The newly cleaned St. George, from the west, interior, 2000

since that time has been almost completely destroyed by illegal excavation.

The narrow third section of the city lay between the lower south side of the acropolis and a nearly parallel ridge or outcropping of bedrock known as Malo Gradište, which served as the foundation for a city wall. The eastern end of Malo Gradište has been destroyed, and the eastern third of this section of the city has been leveled for the purpose of cultivation.¹⁴ A large city gate near the foot of Malo Gradište provided access to this part of the city. Two parallel lines of city wall ran from the gate to the west end of the acropolis hill.

Outside the fortified city, a deep ravine separates the east slope of Golemo Gradište from the next cliff to the east, Gagin Kamen. A road, partly cut into the rocky bottom of the ravine, partly paved with large stone slabs, runs through the ravine.¹⁵ Presumably of Roman or late antique construction, the road was still being used for local traffic in 1998.

Outside the city and across the Kriva River to the northwest, on a plateau known as K'šla, a few grave inscriptions and the discovery in 1995 of forty-six early Roman burials indicate the presence of a Roman necropolis. Of the six published Latin inscriptions from Konjuh,¹⁶ five appear to be funerary; only two preserve complete texts. The epitaph of Sabinus Antius, a thirty-five-year-old soldier, has been dated to the second half of the third or the beginning of the fourth century.¹⁷ Some or all of the excavated early Roman graves had been dug into a tumulus; both inhumations and cremations were found in arched tile graves, that is, graves consisting of one or more pairs of pantiles with their long sides leaning against each other at the top to form a kind of arch over the body or the cremated remains.

At Crkvica, near the southern edge of K'šla,

are the remains of a small early Byzantine church. Definitive statements must await its publication, but the combination of large vaulted tomb and small church is paralleled at a number of sites nearby and further south, for example, the enormous tomb beside the earliest church at Morodvis in the Bregalnica Valley, the cemetery church on Karatasou Street within the fortification walls of Beroia, and Basilica B at Argos Orestikon (ancient Diocletianopolis?) near Kastoria.

THE ACROPOLIS OF GOLEMO GRADIŠTE AND THE EXCAVATIONS IN 2000

Almost all visitors to the site have commented on the rock-cut features of the acropolis, which appear at first to be a confused jumble of cells, walls, streets, water channels, niches, cuttings for columns, rooms, staircases, and other features (Fig. 4). Closer observation has shown at least two quite different approaches to the utilization of the bedrock cliffs and, on the eastern portion of the hill, successive phases of use.

The rooms along the north side of the eastern plateau were created by quarrying and cutting down into the bedrock from the top and leaving sections of it standing to serve as foundations for walls. The rooms are roughly square or rectangular with an occasional apse. Corridors and staircases run parallel with or at right angles to adjacent rooms, and the stairs provide access to rooms located in the north face of the cliff or to the narrow terrace along the north edge of the acropolis. Odd features abound, but the assumption of the right and the ability to adapt the landscape to their needs by removing and shaping large sections of bedrock, as well as the organization and manpower required, point to a Roman or more likely a late antique date for the original creation of the architectural complex on the eastern plateau.

On the western part of the acropolis the best-known feature is the room (3.80 × 3.35 m) that was created by digging horizontally into a cliff face (Fig. 5). This room included a rock-cut bed on the south side under a window, a bench around the west and north sides, and a tomb in the middle of the floor.¹⁸ The doorway opens

¹⁴ According to local informants, in the early 1980s the Kratovo-based company Sileks used heavy machinery to destroy the east end of the ridge and thus made the south-east part of the site accessible to tractors and combines. The plans of the site drawn by I. Mikulčić in the 1970s show Malo Gradište with a tower marking its east end and the southeast corner of the city.

¹⁵ Lilčić, "Razmisľuvanja," 36–37.

¹⁶ Dragojević-Josifovska, *Inscriptions*, 177–80, nos. 234–39. A seventh inscription found on an impost capital in the Rotunda is described below.

¹⁷ B. Josifovska, "Jedan novi vojnički natpis iz Konjuha," *Živa antika* 13/14 (1964): 166–70.

¹⁸ Despite references to rooms or cells in the plural, this is the only one of its kind. It was described and drawn by

onto a terrace, and cuttings in the rock above the entrance suggest a porch or a second room built in front of the rock-cut one. Around and above this terrace are niches of various shapes and sizes, a number of curving staircases that consist of footholds and even handholds carved into vertical rock faces, and cuttings for beams that point to rooms built against the cliffs. The people who occupied this part of the acropolis seem to have had both less ability to cut and quarry bedrock and possibly a more benign attitude toward the utilization of the cliffs of Golemo Gradište. The evidence suggests that a small community once lived around the terrace. The hypothesis we inherited, that it was a monastic community in the medieval period, awaits further investigation.

The collection and analysis of surface pottery on the acropolis in 1998 had indicated occupation in the prehistoric, Hellenistic, late Roman/late antique, and medieval periods.¹⁹ Pottery of the fourth–sixth centuries was by far the most common. With the exception of several types of late Roman amphorae from Carthage, however, imports were rare, not only on the acropolis but everywhere ceramic material was collected. The usual Roman finewares were entirely absent, and no pottery dating between the third century B.C. and the third century A.D. could be identified.

Two test trenches dug on the acropolis in 1998 revealed debris from a late sixth- or early seventh-century destruction. In the first one, near the south edge of the central part of the acropolis, numerous fragments of large storage vessels and cooking pots were found in a room formed by two rock-cut north-south walls. In the second test, in the southwest part of the eastern plateau, part of a poorly preserved oven or kiln came to light.²⁰

Radojčić, “Crkva.” The other rock-cut spaces opening from the terrace look more like storage spaces, complete with cuttings along the front edges for the insertion of boards, than monastic cells. One other, fairly sizable room, dug horizontally into the south face of the acropolis, has been discovered further to the east and at a lower level; although partly filled with earth, it appears to be a simple room without amenities.

¹⁹ V. Anderson-Stojanović provided this summary of the ceramic material in her 1998 report. Fields south and west of the acropolis yielded pottery of prehistoric to Turkish date. Pottery from a field on K’šla was dated to the 3d century. A number of sherds found in 2001 in late antique or medieval contexts have now been identified by Vojislav Sanev of the Museum of Macedonia as local wares of the Neolithic and the Iron Age.

On the basis of information from the survey material and the test trenches, we expected to find substantial remains from the late antique period on the hill. In summer 2000 we therefore excavated in three sectors on the eastern half of the acropolis. In each area, rock-cut architecture was visible on the surface, and the trenches were placed to investigate that architecture and, if possible, to elucidate its use.

Sector I “Cisterna”

Near the highest point of the acropolis, above and west of the eastern plateau, we investigated a large room, ca. 4 × 10 m, dug down more than 2 m into the rock²¹ (Fig. 6). Two test trenches were dug to the floor of the room, one in the northwest corner along the north wall, and a second one running north-south across the room to the east of its midpoint. In Trench 1, two bedrock features projecting from the surface of the north wall and the floor nearby suggest their deliberate use in the plan or function of the room when it was hewn from the rock. In Trench 2, two roughly circular depressions near the north wall of the chamber could have been created at any time during the use of the building, perhaps for storage jars. The excavator concluded that the room had functioned as a storage chamber, a cellar below a building constructed of large, carefully worked stone blocks. After the structure went out of use, the walls collapsed into the underground room; a section of wall composed of sizable blocks was excavated where it had fallen into Trench 2.

No evidence for the original date of construction was found, but the underground

²⁰ For both test trenches we took advantage of holes dug by illegal excavators, cleaned their profiles, and then dug stratigraphically beside them.

²¹ Virginia Anderson-Stojanović was the excavator in this sector; this account is based on her season report. As indicated by the name given to this area, we had originally assumed that the room was a cistern. Anderson-Stojanović points out that no traces of plaster or mortar exist on any of the already exposed or newly excavated surfaces, and that several deep cracks through the bedrock argue against a water-tight container. Our original identification as a cistern raises the problem of water supply on the acropolis. There is and probably was no source of water on the hill. All water must be carried up either from the river or from three springs outside the city or collected during rains and stored for later use. An archaeologist from the Kumanovo Museum has mentioned evidence for an aqueduct bringing water to the site, but we have not yet verified details and location.

room and its superstructure seem likely to have formed a part of the late antique complex on the acropolis. After the collapse of the superstructure, the room was used as a garbage dump, as suggested by many animal bones and much fragmentary pottery. All of the material found in the room was later than the late antique period and remains to be studied and a chronological determination made.

Sector IA

To the east of the subterranean room, the terrain drops abruptly to the eastern plateau (Fig. 7). Sector IA is located near the foot of that drop, at the western end of the plateau, and stretching back from its northern edge. Within an excavated surface area of ca. 100 m², two rooms of a large building, possibly administrative but more likely residential, were found.²²

Room 1 at the west had interior dimensions of 3.60 × 9.40 m; it displayed an apse at the north and a doorway in the south wall (Fig. 8). The dimensions of room 2, adjoining the first room on the east side, were 4.0 × 9.0 m. Near its south wall a round hearth (diameter 1.20 m) was cut into the bedrock floor.

The western wall of room 1 consisted of a bedrock socle above which a wall of stones and mortar once rose. The north walls of both rooms had been almost completely destroyed, but their impressions could be traced in the mortar substructure. The south wall was carefully built of similarly sized stones bonded with lime mortar. Evidence for two phases of construction are visible in the building. The east wall of room 2, constructed of stones and mud mortar, appeared to the excavator to have subdivided an originally larger room. Two doorways once connecting rooms 1 and 2 had been closed in the second phase.

The floor of room 1, almost completely preserved, showed two circles formed from small pieces of gray or white limestone against a background of red tile fragments. In room 2, a leveled bedrock surface formed part of the floor, with pieces of tile filling the intervening spaces.

The depth of fill in Sector IA did not exceed 0.50 m. The stratigraphy was relatively simple: (1) a surface layer of grass and earth with a great deal of post-late antique pottery, and (2) a

layer of debris heavy with large stones, which rested on the floor.

The small finds included sherds of coarse pottery, metal belt buckles, knife blades, and an earring. Unfortunately nothing found in the two rooms provides any evidence for their function. A first half of the sixth-century date has been tentatively proposed for the building.²³

The two excavated rooms lie at the northern edge of the plateau. The building almost certainly extended to the east and the west. The discovery of this building demonstrates the presence of monumental architecture on the acropolis of Golemo Gradište. Several fragments of stone moldings, including one of marble, point to a degree of provincial elegance.

Sector IB

In three trenches in Sector IB we investigated the north-south width of the eastern plateau, from the eroded rock-cut remains of an apsidal room and a corridor at the north, to the line of the fortification/terrace wall marking the south edge of the plateau, a distance of ca. 17.5 m. The surface of the plateau drops ca. 1.5 m from the north to the south side.²⁴

Excavation in the first 5 × 5 m trench at the north quickly revealed a very rough surface of beaten stones and earth covering the leveled bedrock in the apsidal room; east of the room ran a rock-cut corridor, whose north end connected with two staircases carved into the cliff forming the northern edge of the plateau. The depth of earthen fill in Trench 1 nowhere exceeded 0.20 m.

Trench 2, also 5 × 5 m, was located one meter to the south of the first one. As a test later showed, the level of the bedrock dropped ca. 0.50 m in the space between the two trenches; bedrock was not reached in Trenches 2 or 3.

The third trench was located one meter to the south of Trench 2 and extended to the south edge of the plateau. The north face of the fortification/terrace wall formed the effective southern edge of Trench 3, whose length became 5.60 m along the east side and 6.20 m along the west. Excavation in a 2 m wide strip along the west side, Trench 3a, reached a final

²² Danče Golubovska was the excavator in this sector; her season report is the basis for this account.

²³ The pottery on which Golubovska bases this date comes from within the building and on or above the floor; it does not therefore provide reliable evidence for the date of construction.

²⁴ Carolyn Snively was the excavator in this sector.

depth of ca. 2.6 m beside the fortification wall (Fig. 9).

Wall 1, running east-west across Trench 3a parallel to and ca. 3.5 m north of the terrace/fortification wall, appears to have separated a paved room to the north from a cellar at the south. A deposit of debris with roof tiles and large fragments of smashed pottery covered a floor of stones and packed earth north of Wall 1. Testing below this floor revealed a very solid packing and substructure. Three stone steps of a stairs, built beside the north face of Wall 1, led from this floor up to the east, perhaps to an upper story above the cellar on the south side of Wall 1.

South of this wall, the western face of a second wall appeared in the scarp of Trench 3a. Wall 2, which lack of time did not permit us to investigate, was associated with deposits of clay. Below those deposits and the bottom of Wall 2, a layer of debris ca. 0.90 m deep appeared in the space between Wall 1 and the terrace/fortification wall. It included, among other things, many roof tile fragments and large sherds of broken pots, window glass, and vessel fragments, five loom weights, 5 small millstones (?), iron fragments, and a small marble slab. No identifiable floor or use level was found beneath this debris, a circumstance which suggests that the artifacts fell from an upper floor into this subterranean space. Although the bottom of the debris and of the fortification wall lay at nearly the same depth, we continued to excavate another ca. 0.60 m of earth, of which the final 0.30 m was sterile soil.

The fortification wall is preserved in Trench 3a to a height of ca. 2 m. Although its north face displays a solid construction of fieldstones and lime mortar, the southern exterior face of the wall could not be found and appears to have been destroyed to its foundation.

Given the very limited area of excavation in Sector IB, particularly Trench 3a, we can reach only preliminary interpretations and conclusions. The ceramic material from the destruction debris above the floor north of Wall 1 and from the 0.90 m deep deposit of debris at a lower level south of Wall 1 appears on initial examination²⁵ to be similar and probably to represent the late sixth- or early seventh-century

destruction encountered elsewhere on the site. This conclusion, which may require revision, would indicate that Wall 2 and associated deposits represent post-late antique activities on the acropolis, behind the shelter of the still existing terrace/fortification wall.

Our present hypothesis, to be tested in future seasons, states that the gently sloping plateau on the eastern third of the acropolis is an artificial construction of the late antique period. The remains of rock-cut walls along the north side of the plateau show that the bedrock once rose to a greater height. Because it drops off toward the south, however, a relatively level space was created by building a series of terrace walls and one major wall that probably served (1) as terrace wall, (2) as the supporting south wall of buildings, and (3) as a fortification along the edge of the newly created plateau.

THE ROTUNDA CHURCH

Ca. 160 m south of Malo Gradište and thus outside the fortified city, the remains of an unusual early Byzantine church in the form of a Rotunda are visible (Figs. 10, 11). Local villagers excavated the building in 1919, and it has stood exposed to the elements for more than eighty years with only minimal conservation. The use of large, cut stone blocks in the walls and piers of the Rotunda is typical of the region and is probably a factor in the partial survival of the excavated structure. Radojčić's article,²⁶ describing the state of the church in 1938, remains an essential source for scholars who wish to study the Rotunda, because he documented and discussed elements of the church that no longer exist.

The exterior walls of the church form a trapezoid, ca. 21 m long, whose east and west walls are parallel. A rectangular apse protrudes from the east wall and buttresses in the form of small towers from the east corners. A central doorway in the west wall gave access to a small narthex flanked, within the west corners of the trapezoid, by apsidal rooms. A modern chapel was constructed over the northwest apsidal room in 1955, so that Radojčić's photo²⁷ pro-

²⁵ Anderson-Stojanović did not have the opportunity to analyze the pottery from the last week of excavation, so that

the preliminary conclusions about chronology here and in Sector IA are those of Snively and Golubovska respectively.

²⁶ Radojčić, "Crkva," 152–67.

²⁷ Radojčić, "Crkva," fig. 16.

vides the only view of it. Cleaning in 1998 verified that the east end of the southwest room was apsidal and that a platform had occupied the apse.

From the narthex, through a tribelon, one entered a U-shaped aisle or corridor whose east ends formed pastophoria beside the presbyterium. A circle of four piers and six large mullion columns divided the aisle from the round nave, which could be entered at the west through a second tribelon and through two entrances beside the eastern piers. Screen slabs resting on a low wall closed the other four intercolumniations, at north and south.

The two large, irregularly shaped piers at the east side of the nave marked the west corners of the presbyterium; between them stood a chancel screen of slabs supported by six posts. The southern half of the base for the screen is still preserved. Radojčić found no trace of an altar on the east-west axis in front of the apse. His plan showed the destruction of the central stone slabs of the presbyterium floor, suggesting that the reliquary normally to be found under the altar had been removed in antiquity or between 1919 and 1938. Cleaning in 1998 revealed one slab of the floor still *in situ* at the north side of the presbyterium.

Clergy benches at the north and south sides of the presbyterium abutted the piers marking the west ends of the apse; some blocks of the southern bench are preserved. Between them and the piers at the west corners of the presbyterium, narrow openings allowed access to the pastophoria, from which doors in the north and south wall of the church opened to the exterior.

A unique feature of the Rotunda was the blind corridor within the apse. As Radojčić showed both in plan and in photograph,²⁸ the inner side of the rectangular apse was semicircular, but a wall—straight on its west face, convex on the east—ran across the chord of the apse, except at the south side where the entrance to the blind annular corridor formed by the two concentric apsidal walls was located. Three steps cut into the front of the wall on the chord of the apse presumably led up to a platform on top of the wall or above the corridor; there the episcopal throne or the seat of the

presiding clergyman once stood. The only part of this construction now preserved consists of several precariously balanced blocks at the north corner of the apse. Cleaning carried out in 1998, in the hope of finding traces of a foundation for the vanished inner apsidal wall, indicated that no foundations had been employed in the church for any features except load-bearing walls and piers. Small rectangular spaces were noted at the corners of the apse, a feature not shown on Radojčić's plan. The annular corridor may be related to the *kykleia* noted in sixth-century churches further south, for example, in Basilica A at Amphipolis, or conceivably even to the apsidal crypts found in churches in Macedonia.²⁹ But the precise purpose of the blind annular corridor in the Rotunda at Konjuh remains and probably will remain a mystery.

Between the northwestern part of the aisle and the apse of the northwest room, where the wall was quite thick, Radojčić noted a doorway opening to a staircase leading to an upper story. In 1998 no evidence for the staircase was extant. A shallow niche occupied a similar position in the southwest wall of the corridor.

Radojčić assumed that the dome, the arches above the colonnade, and the vault covering the aisle had been constructed of brick, of which many examples were still visible in the debris at the time of his visit; hexagonal bricks also paved the floors of nave and aisle. Not even small fragments of brick or tile now remain in the building.³⁰ A reconstruction of the upper portions of the Rotunda, including the dome, the roof above the narthex and aisle, and possible galleries, awaits further study of the remains.³¹

Radojčić found a large number of pieces of architectural sculpture in the Rotunda; some were removed to the Archaeological Museum,

²⁹ C. Snively, "Apsidal Crypts in Macedonia: Possible Places of Pilgrimage?" *JbAC*, suppl. 20.2 (1995): 1179–84. Also of relevance may be P. Chevalier's discussion of the "synthronos libre" in Dalmatian churches in her book, *Ecclesiae Dalmatiae. L'architecture paléochrétienne de la province Romaine de Dalmatie* (Rome, 1996), 2:117–18.

³⁰ A large number of ancient bricks are visible in a 20th-century building near the Rotunda. Workmen from the village of Konjuh have told us that bricks and roof tiles from the site are very valuable for the construction of ovens.

³¹ One of the goals of the Konjuh Project is to carry out additional minor investigations in and around the Rotunda and to publish a definitive study of this unique monument.

²⁸ Radojčić, "Crkva," figs. 11, 12.

now the Museum of Macedonia, in Skopje, while others remain on site.³² In addition to the bases of the mullion columns of the colonnade and pieces of the columns themselves, Radojčić recorded three impost capitals; one carried a brief, enigmatic inscription. The function of four smaller capitals remains uncertain. Fragments of the posts from the chancel screen base also appeared, richly carved in a soft, green local stone. Radojčić divided the pieces of flat and curved screens into three groups: (1) those with relief carving, mostly of animals, on only one side; (2) fragments from the chancel screen, carved on both sides with variations of crosses in circles;³³ and (3) pieces from the ambo.³⁴

From the time of its initial publication, the date assigned to the Rotunda on the basis of its plan and its architectural sculpture has been the sixth century.³⁵ I. Nikolajević dated the sculpture to the middle of the sixth century, citing its connections with Justinianic monuments in Serbia, for example, at Caričin Grad.³⁶ Neither the investigations of the Protection Institute in 1988 nor ours a decade later revealed any new archaeological evidence for dating the building; almost no pottery was found. Nevertheless, the plan and the architectural sculpture are not consistent with the fourth-century date recently advanced for the Rotunda by Blaga Aleksova.³⁷ Radojčić posed the question whether there had been more than one phase of construction. The investigations of the Protection Institute and ours confirmed Radojčić's own conclusion that no major renovations had

taken place in the church; it was basically a one-phase building. The only piece of evidence for change or renovation was the walling-up of the north exterior doorway.³⁸

Radojčić also asked whether the Rotunda had served as a martyrium, adducing its central plan and the inscription on an impost capital, ΔΟΜΑΤΡΙΡΣ, interpreted as *domus martyris*. He suggested that relics might have been kept in one of the western apsidal rooms or that the grave of a martyr might have been located under the altar.³⁹ Aleksova identified the building as a martyrium and assumed that members of the local elite had been buried in the western rooms.⁴⁰

The most significant discovery made by the Protection Institute in 1988 was that the building had been constructed on a nearly sterile site. Everywhere, except in the southwest room, a layer of yellow clay appeared below the surface humus and broken pieces of the substructure of the now vanished floor. Additional cleaning along the east-west axis of the presbyterium in 1998 exposed undisturbed yellow clay immediately below the surface deposit and indicated that only a small and shallowly placed reliquary could have occupied the space under the altar. The modern chapel makes investigation in the northwest room impossible for the foreseeable future. Below the southwest room, however, the Protection Institute uncovered two walls forming the right-angled corner of an earlier structure. The walls were smaller than those of the Rotunda and of different construction and orientation. No evidence of burials was reported. The Protection Institute's trench along the outer face of the church walls was excavated through yellow clay without finds.

The central plan and the inscription remain the only evidence for a martyrium. No burials were found in the church or immediately

³² Radojčić, "Crkva," 154–55; I. Nikolajević-Stojković, *Ranovizantijska dekorativna plastika u Makedoniji, Srbiji, i Crnoj Gori* (Belgrade, 1957), 47–50, 91; R. F. Hodkinson, *Early Byzantine Churches in Macedonia and Southern Serbia* (London, 1963), 220–26. Snežana Filipova, from the University of Cyril and Methodius in Skopje, is restudying the architectural sculpture from Konjuh.

³³ K. Petrov, "Staurodekoracija od Konjuh," *Zbornik na Arheološki Muzej Skopje* 2 (1957–58): 31–45.

³⁴ K. Petrov, "Rekonstrukcija na ambonot od rotunda vo Konjuh," *Godišen Zbornik na Filozofski Fakultet, Skopje* 22 (1970): 271–302; J.-P. Sodini, "La sculpture architecturale à l'époque paléochrétienne en Illyricum," in *Actes du Xe Congrès International d'Archéologie Chrétienne, Thessalonique, 1980* (Thessalonike–Vatican City, 1984), 1:293–94.

³⁵ Radojčić, "Crkva," 163.

³⁶ Nikolajević-Stojković, *Dekorativna plastika*, 50.

³⁷ B. Aleksova, "Konjuh: Golemo Gradište," in *Arheološka karta*, vol. 2 (Skopje, 1996), 184–85; eadem, *Loca Sanctorum Macedoniae. The Cult of Martyrs in Macedonia from the 4th to the 9th Centuries* (Skopje, 1997), 259–60.

³⁸ Radojčić, "Crkva," 155. As indicated above, on the acropolis of the city there is clear evidence of a late 6th- or early 7th-century destruction; an extramural church would not have escaped that destruction. We found no evidence to support Aleksova's contention that the church had functioned again in the 9th and 10th centuries, although the general area including the Rotunda to the south of Malo Gradište is known as Selište and seems to have been occupied for some period between late antiquity and modern times. We shall never know if evidence for later reuse existed in 1919 and was swept away.

³⁹ Radojčić, "Crkva," 154–56.

⁴⁰ Aleksova in *Arheološka Karta*, 185; eadem, *Loca Sanctorum*, 256, 259–60.

around it.⁴¹ Although a church of the sixth century would certainly have included a relic under the altar, the data are insufficient for us to say whether the Rotunda served as a martyrrium in any additional sense.

Ca. 150 m southeast of the Rotunda a *hagiasma*, of unknown antiquity but still in use in 1998,⁴² is located within a grove of trees. The shrine consists of an enclosure focused on a small structure that stands above the mouth of a well. The springhouse, if it may be so called, is built of stone blocks.⁴³ Icons decorate the facade of the structure, and niches in the enclosure wall hold cups and other containers for water. The mineral water from the well is said to be a panacea.⁴⁴ Although the distance between the Rotunda and the *hagiasma* leaves any connection between them uncertain, the existence of the latter reminds us that numerous pagan shrines may have stood in the countryside around Golemo Gradište and offered sites and reasons for the construction of churches.

CLEANING AND DOCUMENTATION OF THE CHURCH OF ST. GEORGE

Ca. 300 m southwest of the site and ca. 400 m west of the Rotunda, within the functioning cemetery of the village of Konjuh, stands the roofless church known as St. George (Fig. 12). The building and the graveyard are isolated from the surrounding fields by ravines and can be easily approached only from the southeast. St. George stands a few meters east of the deep ravine through which a small stream runs north to the Kriva River. A spring rises in the ravine near the church.

St. George is a one-aisle building with a protruding eastern apse. It is approximately 7 m long by 4.5 m wide. It was built in part of large stone blocks, presumably taken from the ruins of the ancient city; small stones, brick and tile fragments, and mortar fill in the spaces between the blocks. A fragment of a Roman tombstone was built into the outer face of the south

wall. Wooden beams, visible on the interior, reinforced the structure. The use of smaller stones and different construction, especially near the top of the walls, suggests interventions and perhaps a new roof at some point. The remnants of the roof indicate that it too was of stone.

A band of decorative brickwork is still preserved across the east wall above the apse. Three niches break up the monotony of the exterior face of the north wall. A narrow window opened at a relatively low level in the apse, and an apparent second window was located in the south wall. The only entrance is centered in the west wall.

The floor had been paved with large stone slabs of varying shape; they rested on a stone foundation. At some time, probably after World War II, treasure hunters pried up the stone slabs of the floor and left them projecting at angles here and there with gaping holes between. Two trees took root within the ruined floor and grew higher than the preserved walls. The date when the roof collapsed is not known but predated Radojčić's visit in 1938.

Two vertical slabs of the chancel barrier remain *in situ*, as does the base for the altar within the chancel area. Severely damaged remains of fresco are still visible on the east wall (Fig. 13).

The church was declared a "monument of culture" and placed under legal protection in 1954 under the name of St. George.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, neither the original dedication nor the date of construction is known; the proposed dates run from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century. Radojčić, in his survey of the site, described and briefly discussed this church, provided a plan and photograph, and identified it as a church of the Holy Archangel. He cites as evidence for this identification the fresco in the lunette above the entrance, now vanished without a trace; he was, in fact, arguing against an earlier identification as St. Nicholas.⁴⁶

In July 2000 we took the following measures.

⁴¹ A pile of stone slabs in a field some distance to the south of the Rotunda is the only evidence for burials in the vicinity.

⁴² In summer of 2000 the shrine appeared to be neglected and no longer in use.

⁴³ We observed a similar little stone building built over a spring in the ravine southwest of the church of St. George.

⁴⁴ Radojčić, "Crkva," 152, mentions the spring briefly as does Aleksova, *Loca Sanctorum*, 252.

⁴⁵ Information provided by D. Golubovska.

⁴⁶ Radojčić, "Crkva," 148–49, figs. 6–7. There has been considerable controversy about the dedication of this church, including the question whether Radojčić might have confused its saint with that of another church still standing in the vicinity in 1938. We know from local informants that a church once stood near the modern bridge over the Kriva River, only a few hundred meters from the one now referred to as St. George.

The two trees inside the shell of the church were removed without damage to the standing walls. The floor slabs, torn from their places, were replaced. Loose earth was removed from the interior of the building. The architectural pieces and *spolia* found inside the church were documented and arranged along the walls. A trench immediately outside the west doorway, presumably dug by treasure hunters, was cleaned, examined, and backfilled. Architectural pieces and *spolia* found outside and around the church were examined, separated from heaps of unworked stone, and drawn or photographed. The terrace wall near the south side of the church and the two stone "tables" for funerary meals, located to the southeast and north of the building, were cleaned of vegetation.

The present condition of the church was documented both photographically and by means of architectural drawings. It will now be possible to study the building, which presents several interesting features. We also hope that documentation of the present precarious condition of St. George will move it up in the long queue of churches awaiting conservation.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Our excavations on the acropolis of Golemo Gradište, together with observations about other parts of the site and its environs, have led to several conclusions, some of which may require revision in the future, and to a number of hypotheses to be tested in coming seasons. It now seems clear that the general area was occupied, at least sporadically, from the late Bronze Age to the period of Turkish domination, although the natural fortification of Golemo Gradište and the site of the late antique city were not always the focus of activities. The locations of any prehistoric, Hellenistic, and early Roman settlements remain to be discovered. Although no stratified, post-late antique deposits were found on the acropolis in 2000,⁴⁷ the amount of later pottery points to

long-term or intensive occupation in the medieval period. Analysis of the excavated material and its correlation with pottery from other parts of the site will eventually provide a clearer idea of the shifting patterns of activity on and around Golemo Gradište through the centuries.

In late antiquity a heavily fortified city occupied the site. To what extent this was a rebuilding, a fortification, and an enlargement of an earlier town remains unclear. The number of sixth-century coins found on and around the site point to major activity here in the sixth century.⁴⁸ Very likely this city participated in the Justinianic building program described by Procopius (*De aedificiis* 4.4). One might then ask if reconstruction was needed because the Scupi earthquake of 518, described by Marcellinus Comes 100, had devastated this region.

The discovery of relatively large and substantial buildings on the acropolis in all three sectors investigated points to intensive adaptation and use of at least the eastern part of the hill in the late antique period. The time and effort required to carve rooms into the bedrock and to construct a fortification wall and terrace walls in order to create the eastern plateau do not reflect emergency response to a threat but rather a planned and deliberate program of building. But intentional and long-term occupation of an acropolis so inaccessible raises a series of questions. What segment of the population chose or was compelled to live there? Local officials? A military garrison? And why? For defensive or strategic reasons? The answers to such questions are not available yet, but our work in 2000 has begun to fill in with facts and details the general picture of the site painted by survey. We expect that investigations in future seasons will allow us to answer some of the questions about this fascinating site.

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⁴⁷ Medieval levels are being excavated in 2001.

⁴⁸ E.g., Lilčić, "Razmisľuvanja," 37 and figs. 7–9.